o. 8. {Whole No 138} *Price, 10 Cents. Per Annum, $3.00.* Vol. VI.

SATURDAY, MAY 13, 1871.

Subject: The Ages to Come.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

New-York:

J. B. FORD & CO., No. 27 PARK PLACE,

1871.

AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY, AGENTS FOR THE TRADE.

AUTHORIZATION.

Brooklyn, January, 1869.

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THE AGES TO COME.

"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus."—Eph. ii., 7.

The context is this:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus."

You will observe how passionately anxious the apostle is to show that all that God did to Jesus Christ he did likewise to us. And as our elder brother, we are inseparable partners and brothers with him. When we were dead in sins, he quickened us together with Christ. Dead in body; but quickened by the power of God. Dead in sins; but quickened by the same power. Raised up together, and made to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. Partnership, indissoluble union, is here indicated.

There is something very impressive and admirable in that long look ahead which distinguished the worthies of old. None ever lived so sympathetically in the present as they did. None ever lived so far away from the present, and so far ahead of it, as they did. They fed their souls upon the visions of ages to come. It was a triumphant forelooking in Moses that seems to have excited the apostle's admiration: "*who endured as seeing him who is invisible.*" It was that feature in the Saviour that attracted the eye of admiration: "*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.*" It was this forelooking to the sustenance which it brought, and the rest under disquietude which it gave, and the inspiration in the midst of despair which it ministered, that led the apostle otherwheres to say, "*Ye are saved by hope*"—not meaning that the active and justifying reason of salvation is that we are hopeful, but that in our warfare with the world we derive from hope such important help and inspiration that it may be said that without it we never could get along.

SUNDAY MORNING, April 30, 1871. LESSON: HEB. XII. 1—11; 22—25. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 725, 878, 1259.

The apostles seemed to regard their whole experience of the present as a mere hint, an earnest, a bond for a deed. Here, in this life, everything seemed to them but in its initial state, in its seminal stage. The harvest lay beyond, and a great way beyond, in the gathering of the church—in the whole future condition of the world, when nations should be righteous; when Christ should possess the whole earth. In looking forward to all those great elements they saw simply glimpses and hints of them. And they accepted the intimations of the present as so many tokens of something transcendently better, for which they were laboring, and for which they were waiting, but toward which they were traveling.

The glory of God's work cannot be found out on earth—this was their feeling. "In the ages to come" it will disclose itself. Now, rudeness and heartlessness and discord; but "in the ages to come," melody, the sweetest and most continuous. Now, collision, conflict, and suffering; but "in the ages to come," peace and joy unspeakable and full of glory. Now, all darkness; at times twilight at the best; but "in the ages to come," perfect light, perfect disclosure, perfect knowledge. Now, the rudiment; but then, when ages shall have passed, the full form.

1. We need just such a forelooking. The condition of the human race as it now exists is not a theme for pleasurable meditation. To those who believe in the moral government of God, and in the active administration of affairs in this world and in nature by the divine mind, the actual condition of the race seems utterly inexplicable. It is full of pain. The lowness of the average of intelligence and of social virtue, and the still lower average of spiritual conditions, fills the mind with amazement that God is Father. The greatest part of the world is but little redeemed from barbarism; and the development of the race from barbarism has been, within historic periods, coming on with extreme slowness. Indeed, what has been gained on one side, seems to have been lost on the other. It is true that more races are civilized than at any former period; but how many thousands of years have been expended! and how little of that time seems to have had addressed to it any active or apparently divinely-guided instruments of restraint! How little knowledge of the origin of men, how little knowledge of their own powers, how little knowledge of the laws of the globe on which they dwell, and how little knowledge of the principles on which their prosperity depends, has there been! How little has tended toward civilization, and how much toward animalism and superstition! How little has tended toward anything but brutality! Nations learn but very little, and that little they forget easily. The intellectual and the

moral faculties are certainly stronger to-day than ever they were before; they are stronger in a greater number; but the animal passions of the race do not seem to have lost any force. Nor do they seem to be under any greater control than they were a thousand or two thousand years ago.

Nor is it altogether a relief to us to leave the world to natural causes. That would be a relief if generations did not die, and if we did not have to account in some way for those that disappear from this life and re-appear in some other world. If annihilation met the incomplete manhood; if death rubbed out being, as the figures on a boy's slate are rubbed out where the sum is wrong, that it may be begun again, it would not be so mysterious nor so strange. But to suppose that through age after age, and age after age, almost without instruments, without schools, without churches, without a Bible, without missionaries, without ministers, without even the knowledge of the commonest principles of physical life, the race has been prolific, bubbling up enormously, and dying off, myriads and myriads and myriads pouring like a mighty tide into the great invisible world beyond—to contemplate that, and to see how the process is still going on—if that does not task one's faith, if that does not wring one's hope, or fear, as the case may be, I know not what can.

And it is to be rememembered, too, that as we ourselves become imbued with the spirit of the Gospel we supply severer tests to civilization, and experience more revulsion from barbarism, and the marvel increases. As a light shines brighter and brighter in one place, so the darkness grows more and more impenetrable in every other place.

Therefore it is that we must believe, if we believe at all without explanation, that somehow "in the ages to come," when there is a new heaven and a new earth, righteousness will dwell in them. By what road we are coming to it, by what process the work shall be done, we cannot say. Ingenious suggestions may be made, and analogies may be pleaded; yet after all it is but fancy. All that we know is, that "in the ages to come" there is to be a new heaven and a new earth in which will dwell righteousness, and that there is meaning in the the mystic communication that Christ will take his power and come again to reign. If it be not the literal millennial glory which men have counted upon, it will be in some form the substance of which that is a sign and symbol. There is to be a view that shall cast light and glory on the track of nations and races; and the skepticism and animal conditions of the globe are not to continue for ever.

2. The condition of the church itself—all that which we are

wont to esteem as the best part of the church—the most favored, the most enlightened, the most cultured—leads one to rebound from the present, and to seek comfort in looking into "the ages to come." The church of the future—we hear much of it; and the less it resembles the church of the present, I think, the more we shall like it, and the more we shall be comforted by it. For the church of the present evidently is a church of sinful men not yet sanctified. It is the assembling together of the sick, although they may be convalescent. We should not seek beauty in hospitals; and as long as pride and selfishness are what they now are, as long as the spirit of evil so largely baffles the work of grace—so long the church, comprehensively viewed, will be rather a hospital than a mansion or a household of beauty. Single groups here and there comfort the eye. We see in villages and towns, and sometimes in large districts, Christian men living in such a way as to throw light upon all the community, and raise the tone of conscience, and promote civilization. Nevertheless, looking at the church the world over, it is a great army divided against itself, filled with seams, filled with imperfections, careless of the highest things, careful of things almost inconsequential, very slow in progress, given up largely to externalities, twined about with superstitions without real worship, standing fiercely and cruelly for things without value, and with an average of piety that is exceedingly low. "The ages to come,"—we must look into them, if we would comfort ourselves and be kept from despondency when we look into the time that now is. When there shall be no Oriental church and no Occidental church; when neither Greece nor Rome shall give their name to the collective people of God; when the church shall not be divided up into sects warring with each other, and hating each other, and almost wreaking cruelty upon one another—then, in "the ages to come," the household of faith will be built beautifully, and God will dwell with his people, and they shall be like him. We look away from the real and into the ideal, and build, every one as seemeth to him best, the vision of the new state of glory when love shall be, the public sentiment of the church, and the wisdom of the church shall be that which springs from the heart of love.

3. Our knowledge of God in the present state of things, with all that has been done to winnow the wheat from the chaff, is exceedingly incomplete and unsatisfying. Our knowledge of the divine nature is unlike the knowledge of the qualities of matter which may be discerned by the use of our senses. God cannot be learned by any process of observation; nor can his kingdom be studied by scientific methods. As is declared, "The kingdom of

God cometh not with observation." A knowledge of the divine nature is not a thing to be demonstrated by scientific tests. It depends upon growth in us. We cannot understand in God anything of which we have not something in ourselves that stands for a suggestion, an analogue, and of which we have not had a parallel experience. How far can we understand God? As far as we are developed in spiritual directions. How is it possible for us to come to any considerable understanding of God, who is, after all, to us but a Being somewhat greater than good beings whom we have known upon earth? How much can we convey of our nature and of our modes of government to the intelligent creatures that are below us?—for there are creatures below us who understand many things. How much could we make the horse, the dog, or the elephant, understand, either of our dispositions, or of the motives from which we work, or of the structure and nature of our minds, or of the processes of society, or of the civil government which we are carrying on? You could not make them understand these things, because they have not the development, the faculty, that makes the meaning plain to them. The beings below us cannot understand us because they are not sufficiently unfolded.

And is it not so as between us and a superior Intelligence? There is not that in us which can understand God. Parts of his ways, and these the lower parts, we understand; but the distance between us and the Eternal Father is greater than the distance between us and the more intelligent animals below us. And doubtless, the same reason prevails in both directions. Growth is the only interpretation of God which will reveal him to us. It cannot be done by the blazing light. It cannot be done by any formula of words. It cannot be done by any symbolism of nature. All these things may help a little; but none of them are full interpretations, which can come only by the evolution of that which is in us, and which we are. They must be reserved for "the ages to come." It will not be here.

Now, our God is as a brilliant star, too far off for measurement; but bright, we know, and perfect, we know. The fact of his existence we know; but little else do we know concerning him. "In the ages to come" we shall see him as *he is*. Now we see him as *we are*. We make up our God very much out of the materials which we have in ourselves. There is not a question that the conception which a person has of God is largely an ideal made up out of his own experience; out of his own imagination; out of his own constructive reason. It must be so. We cannot do better. Nevertheless, the very best that we can do is still so imperfect that we do

not see Him as he is. Admit that God is perfect wisdom; but how much do we know of perfect wisdom? Admit that he is infinitely just; but how imperfect is our conception of justice! Admit that he is perfectly benevolent; but who understands the realm of benevolence? Admit that he is impartial, and that he is infinite in capacity in every direction; what are these but words? Who of us has any realizing center to such conceptions? We have never seen him. Nor can we see him and live—or while we are living. It is not given to the body to do it. And if we attempt, as we must, as the very best thing we can do, out of our own limited understanding of mercy, and gentleness, and pity, and love, and self-denial and compassion, to conceive of the character of God, it may transcend the heathen deities, it may at times, under the flashing acumination of our imaginations, touched by his Spirit, kindle to a sacred glow. But, after all, when we shall see him as he is, not the first rude daubs of the incipient artist will seem so rude, when the master-artist has found his skill, as our earliest conceptions of God will seem when, "in the ages to come," we shall see Him as he is, no longer as through a glass darkly, no longer as the vision of our own imagination, no longer as the imperfect work of our reason, but in all the amplitude and fullness of the real Being, and when we are so developed that we are able to behold and still to live.

We see on every side how many analogies of this there are. We see how impossible it is for beings to conceive of things that are far along beyond them in the way of development. Who, for instance, that was created with mature power, but had never lived to gather experience, could to-day form the slightest forecast of next October? Who could tell the color of the Autumn from the first growths and germs of the Spring? Imagine an Esquimaux striving to form some idea of the tropics from the missionary's description. What has he to form an idea from but the moss and stinted shrubs that scarcely grow higher than his feet, and the flowers that blossom in the midst of northern glaciers? Would he form a conception of the brilliant fruits of the tropics? He must grub the ground for berries, which are all the fruit that the frigid zone knows. And from the creeping vine of the wintergreen-berries, from the huckleberries, and such like things, he is to form his ideal of those magnificent parasitic plants which fill the tropical forests. These little berries are his oranges and bananas and pine-apples. He attempts, shivering in the midsummer, under the iceberg, to form a conception of the everlasting pomp and glory of the equatorial region. And when he has formed a conception of it, he cheers himself, and sighs, and wishes he could see it. Oh! it is so beautiful in his imagination!

But what does he know of it? What is an Esquimaux' ideal of equatorial glory? The reality transcends unspeakably any conception which he can form.

And that which is to be revealed to you, "in the ages to come," when you shall have left these mortal bodies, when you shall have experienced the sensations of the new life, when you shall have unfolded and come into the realm where things are no longer symbols but realities; when the physical shall have ceased, and the spiritual shall have been ushered in—that will surpass any ideal that your highest imagination has ever pictured.

4. "The ages to come" will reveal a personal experience in us of which now we have but the very faintest trace in analogy. We cannot at present form a conception of perfection in the elements which constitute character. You never can tell what the ripe is from looking at the green. If an unknown seed be brought to you, and you plant it in the ground, and it sprout, and grow for five years, only throwing out leaves, and for five years more, still only throwing out leaves, can you tell how its blossoms are going to look? You never saw them. The tree is a new one. You have seen the root, the leaves, and the bark, and you have cut into the wood; you know its habits for the first ten years; you know when its leaves appear in the Spring, and when they fall off in the Autumn; you know everything about it as far as it has gone during those ten years; but you cannot guess whether its blossoms are white or yellow. You cannot tell whether they will hang in racemes, or rise up in circles. You cannot tell whether they will stand out in spikes, or be pendant. You cannot tell whether they will be early or late. You cannot, if the shrub or tree be unknown, find out the prophecy of the blossoms.

But at last the blossom comes out. Now tell me what that blossom is going to produce. Look at it. Is it going to put forth a pod, or is it going to be a fruit? Is it going to be a seed, or luscious food? You cannot tell from a blossom what the fruit is going to be, except by analogues; and I am now supposing a new plant of which there has been no congener within your knowledge, and that you are attempting, from a lower state, to conceive of the higher.

Now, in regard to human beings, there is nothing in the unripe state of the mind which is a fair interpretation of what ripeness in it is going to be. You could never have told, except by seeing it, what the human reason was competent to do. Consider the force of reason, by which the whole physical universe is being now unbarred; by which the most distant orbs are being searched, weighed, analyzed; by which we are unwrapping the sun, and taking off coat after coat; by which we know more about the sun itself than often-

times men do of the province in which they live on earth. What an education! What an outstretch of thought! What development of the reasoning, searching power of the mind! Who could have suspected it in the days of barbarism? No man could then have told that. And who now can foretell what new development the human reason is capable of? As from the lower stages you could not suspect the higher, so from the present stages you cannot anticipate those which are yet to come. Now we think; but in the higher forms of thinking there is the intuition, the jump, as it were, the flash of thought, with which our present thinking is not to be compared. We call it *intuition*, we call it *inspiration*, we call it names; but names are not things. There is evidently the hint of a wondrous disclosure of power in the direction of reason "in the ages to come." We do not see it here. We cannot know it. We can only know what is the perpetual suggestion of it. Says the apostle St. John:

"We are the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

We are God's sons; but the fullness of that word *sons* is not translated to us. The condition in which we are is such as to make it impossible for us wisely and fully to forecast the future.

Who, for instance, can tell what the difference will be to him when he shall drop the body, with all its appetites and passions? How much of that which is sin in us now is from the excesses of the driving forces of the appetites! Many a man is like a very small boat with a very large engine which racks it all to pieces with its power; and many a man is like a very large boat with a very small engine, so that its motion is feeble and sluggish, because the engine cannot generate enough power to propel it. Some men are over-bodied, and some are under-bodied. Some are over-excitable, and some are under-excitable. There is every conceivable variation in men. It is a matter which seems to follow no law of volition, and no law of nature, and no law of science. And it is a matter about which we are never consulted. We find ourselves set afloat in time with all sorts of craft—some broad and some narrow; some sharp-bowed and some blunt-bowed; some with sails, and some with engines; and some with little help of any kind. And thus equipped every man is to solve the problem of life. Every man is to take his own structure as God has given it to him, and work out true manhood. Every man is to make his own special condition the point of starting and measuring.

Who can conceive what it will be to be set free from all these things, so that the sluggish temperament is dropped; so that the fiery temperament is dropped; so that the intense energy in this or that passional direction has ceased; so that there shall be, as

when a whirlwind has passed, a calm, and there shall be no swaying, as the mighty winds sway the groaning trees; so that there shall be quiet in every bodily inducement to evil? Who can imagine how one will feel under such circumstances? Who can form any idea of what will become of what is left of him? Who can judge of the power to which his reason might have attained, or of the height to which his moral sentiments and affections might have mounted up, if it had not been for cumbering animalism; if it had not been for the fiery temptations which come from fighting instincts; from over-eating and over-drinking; from physical impulsions? We cannot arrive at any notion of how we should feel if we were emancipated from these lower propensities.

Suppose you were to wake up to-morrow morning without being proud, do you know how it would feel? Suppose you were to wake up to-morrow morning not obstinate but easy to be entreated, can you imagine what sort of a creature you would be? Suppose you were to wake up to-morrow morning with the spirit of avarice taken out of you, so that you were not over desirous to gain wealth, but were desirous of being just in your dealings with your fellow-men, can you imagine such a thing? We are always full of sickness; and it is hard for the sick to remember how they felt when they were well, or to realize how they shall feel when they are restored to life again. But "in the ages to come" we shall neither be helped nor hindered by the cumbrances of these mortal bodies.

Some believe that this mortal body rises again. Thank God! not I. I have had enough of it. And when once the earth takes it, let it keep it. The tree is welcome to what of me it can get, so far as the body is concerned. Says the apostle:

"There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Good-by, old flesh and blood. I am bound for God's kingdom without flesh and blood; and what it will be to be without them, I cannot tell; but I know it will be magnificent—never tiring any more, unwearied and unweariable, with nothing to hinder, and everything to help. Is it needful that one should sleep and wake? Is it needful that one should waste half his precious time in sleeping and eating? Is it needful that more than one half of our being should be dedicated to the animal life? Is it needful that there should be but half or a third of our time available for the immortal? However it may be in the present, "in the ages to come," over the mountains, across the valleys, behind the clouds, beyond all calculable periods, there will be a state in which we shall have dropped this natural body, and in which we shall be endued with our spirit-

ual body, whatever that is, and shall be free from the circumscription and weariness of this mortal condition. Who can tell how he will seem, or how he will be, then? Besides, there will be the presence of things which are not known now and here. He shall be surrounded with influences of which we know nothing, but which grow out of the perfected state. We shall be surrounded by a society such as the apostle speaks of.

"Ye are come . . . to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, . . . and to the spirits of just men made perfect."

What would it be to live for a single year in society where every thought, and every look, and every word, and every act, and every suggestion was lifting you higher, and ennobling you? As we live among men, we are perpetually weighing them; we are all the time parrying with them; we are forever defending ourselves against them. We are continually running backward and forward in life. Though we are friends to each other, yet we are more or less hindrances one to another. We are throwing off this and shutting ourselves up against that influence which our fellow-men exert upon us. We are incessantly dodging and eluding each other, as well as helping each other. And who can conceive of that state in which every eye shall shine on him like a star; in which every heart shall impress itself on his heart, and make it better, and give it an impulse in the right direction, so that every being shall imprint on him some glorious aspect; so that as every plant in a garden, though all be united, is beautiful in its own way, so every single creature of the whole realm, lifted into the highest state, shall bring balm and sweetness to every other one? Now, we are hindered, not only, but we are oppressed by each other—by even the well-meaning. And what shall that condition be in which everybody shall help, and everything shall help, and all hindrances shall be gone, and sorrowing and sighing shall have passed away, and singing shall have taken its place, and God shall wipe the tears from every eye!

What can you conceive of the connections which we shall form there in this new society, when friendship shall be purified from all its lower forms and selfishness shall have nothing to do with it, when there shall be no discrepancy between our reason and our conscience, and when we shall be perfectly harmonious?

If fifty men in Bedlam, each having a separate instrument of music, should play on that instrument—one playing his trumpet, another screeching his hautboy, another beating his drum, another playing his fiddle, and others playing their various instruments—each in his own way, and without any reference to the others, who,

going by, could form any idea of what would come from those instruments if every one of these men, having got back to his reason, was playing in perfect harmony and in a sweet concord? The hideous cacophony, the din and the jar, of such a Bedlamite band—would it not be very much like the play of our affections and feelings—sweet instruments, but played in horrible dissonance? And what shall that state be in which God shall make the whole of them to be united sympathetically, and all of them to be played together in unison—every power, every emotion, every instinct of love, sweetened, deepened, broadened, inspired, rendered divine by the presence of God? But this is for "the ages to come."

A hopeful, a joyful imagination of "the ages to come," should be encouraged, though it may be full of fancy and inaccurate—as it will be. For we do not pretend that any man can limn this picture. We do not pretend that any man is entitled to say that his view is any more correct than the views of others. But after all, the main defect of fore-looking into "the ages to come," will be deficiency rather than exaggeration. Our mistake will be, not in making reason too full, but in its meagreness; not in making purity too resplendent, but too tame; not in making joy too great, but too little; not in making things better than they are, but in not knowing how to make them good enough. We are not in any danger of exaggerating, so far as our conception of the future state is concerned.

"We are the sons of God."

There are your figures to cipher with.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

No man can cipher out that result. It will transcend any image that you make of it. Draw from the heavens; draw from all that there is on earth; draw what you can through the channels of inspiration and of revelation; collect and cluster together the things which men have agreed to consider most admirable; and from these form pictorial parables of the City with its golden streets, with its gates of pearl, with its walls of precious stones, with its beautiful gardens, with its flowing rivers, and with its trees whose leaves are for the healing of the nations; picture as you may the future state from oriental conditions, or from the household, or the commonwealth as they now exist; from any and all of these form your conception of it; form your conception of it in any way that you please; but remember that when you have made it just as bright as your imagination can sketch it, when your fancy, architecturally, has wrought it as skillfully as it can, and everything has been carried to the highest pitch that your earthly power will allow, your conception will yet

be imperfect. For the sweet apostle, looking upon you as a father upon his children, says,

"It doth not yet appear."

You have gathered from the cradle purity of idea, and clasp and cling of faith; you have gathered from rich companionship what is the thrill and the joy of the higher life; you have gathered from the patriarch and the matron—saints not yet gone home to glory—dignity and patience, and all that makes generosity and magnanimity; you have gathered your best fruits, and fashioned them into single characters, and into ranks, and into communities, and into nations; and you have combined all these things in your conception of the resplendent throne of the All-Father. And yet, saith the sweet apostle again,

"It doth not yet appear."

Certainly not, brethren. And if you still add nation after nation, and age after age, to that conception, it will still fall short of what the future is to reveal of the goodness of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I will not open the subject further, but will close it with one or two applications.

How much better it is, then, to live by faith, than it is to live by sight—and you will see that, by *faith*, I mean a sanctified imagination, or the imagination applied to spiritual things. I suppose that to be the generic definition of *faith*. That which a man sees in this world is not to be compared for beauty nor for comfort with the things which he can imagine. Merely worldly men look upon things as they are. They must, in so far as business is concerned. The nearer men can come to things as they are, the better workmen they will be, and the better it will be for the transaction of purely secular affairs. But our truest manhood is not in the administration of material things. Our highest nature does not lie merely in the exactitudes of physical elements. We are to have an eye that looks beyond what the mere natural man has known. The spiritual man sees all that the natural man sees, and then sees much besides. It is sad to see how the average of men live in this world. It is sad to see how little they have, and how little they can do; how much there is of desire, and how little there is of satisfaction. It is sad to see how men yearn for happiness, and how seldom they gain it. Joy comes mostly in childhood. Then comes the tug. The bright side of life disappears, pride is humbled, and often grows malignant. Health breaks down. Expectations are overwhelmed. The malign passions rise and dominate over the higher faculties. The average of men live on a very low allowance of enjoyment. They live in

the literal present; and that is very poor. First, they are buoyed up by hope. Then comes anxious expectation. Then they wrestle with disappointment and despondency. And at last they are reduced to the worst straits. And they lose the respect of their fellowmen; and are kicked about in society; and some day it is said of them, "He is dead;" and men say, "Ah!" And that is the end.

One of the most piteous of things is to see how men live. I do not mean barbarians. I mean intelligent men. I mean men brought up by much care and culture. The world is piteous to live in if this is the only world. If there is nothing but what is here, I do not wonder that the aspiring mind cries out, "We are of all men most miserable." But a Christian man, under precisely the same circumstances, has a ground transcendently higher. For if there be nothing for him that suits his ambition, or his yearnings, or his wants, here, he has the land beyond. He knows that he is but a stranger and pilgrim; and he comforts himself, as he goes through the wilderness, thinking of the home toward which he is traveling. And he weaves tapestries, and paints pictures, and carves various creations. Living, as he does by faith, and not merely by sight, his imagining, his picture-painting, his idealizing, his holy revery, is filling the great empty heavens with all conceivable beauty. And what if it be evanescent? So is the wondrous frost-picture on the window; but is it not beautiful, and worth having? So is the summer dew upon the flower; but is it not renewed night by night? And faith is given to man to lift him above the carnal, the dull, the sodden, and to enable him to conceive of things beyond that to which any earthly realization has yet ever attained.

So contrast the difference between going through life on the part of one who has this sense of "the ages to come," and on the part of one who lives only on the horizon of this world. Men who are bound up in this world do not like to think of the future. Men do not like to think of growing old. There comes, almost always, a shock the first time a man finds that his keel grates; the first time he finds that the stream is growing shallower; when he first discovers that there are white hairs upon his head; the first time it fairly comes to him, "Your eyes are giving out;" the first time some not irreverent but inconsiderate person says, "Get out of the way, old man," and he looks around and sees that it is he himself that is being addressed.

I once heard a person say, "I *hate* to grow old." But he was shoved along every day, notwithstanding. He *had* to grow old. The teeth showed it; the hair showed it; the eye showed it; the ear

showed it; every sense showed it. The old tabernacle could not stand the wind and the water that were forever beating upon it and battering it.

But hear Paul say,

"We know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Hear the Master say,

"In my Father's house are many mansions" [apartments.] "I go to prepare a place for you."

A man who believes and takes in the meaning of these declarations, receives the knocks and ill-fortune of life, and says to every wind that shakes his earthly house, "Blow! My real house is not touched by any earth-storm." To every infelicity, every circumscription, and every other token of weakness that comes with growing old, he says, "You have very nearly run out, and I hunger for 'the ages to come.'"

The spiritual man is giving up physical things all the time, and is getting more and more, clear down to the end. But it is just the other way with the natural man. He is all the time trying to hold on to things that are material, and is getting less and less, clear down to the end. The man who lives simply for this world and for his senses, the literal man, is living out his patrimony. He is spending all he has. His pockets grow shallower and shallower. The nerve becomes duller and duller. The eye can no longer see such things as it once did. The ear can no longer hear such pleasant sounds as it has heard. But it is not so with a man that is living by faith. He never hears so much as when he begins to hear nothing. Milton said, in substance, that God shut his eyes that he might shine upon him with the higher light of his own Spirit. To him blindness was not darkness, but that twilight which came upon him from a higher realm. For when this outward body decays, the mind does not decay with it. The apostle puts it in strong antithesis:

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

And, not only that, it grows more and more vivid and intense.

So, the old miser takes care of his wealth, but he cannot help thinking who will have his money. It cannot be many months before he will have to go and leave it; but he does not like to think of such a thing. Next to him, right by the side of his abundance, may be a Christian pauper starving. And in his suffering he says, "Thank God! I am almost home, where my treasure is, and where I shall hunger no more, and have no more care and trouble."

He that is living by the body is living out everything. He is

like a candle that is burning down in the socket. But he that is living in the spirit, is living toward everything—toward hope, toward joy, toward fullness, toward refinement, toward elevation, toward grandeur.

When that venerable and dear old man, my father, for a year was without the knowledge of himself, it was to me the most piteous, the most utterly unbearable of all earthly spectacles, unrelieved but by this single thought—"Old patriarch, your light has not gone out. It is merely obscured by some film of the flesh. It shall not be quenched. And ere long the blow shall come that shall break this casket, and let it out. You are grander than you ever were, and nearer to royalty, always royal."

They that live to the flesh are living crumbling lives, and are going toward dissolution all the time. It is only they who live the life of faith, by the imagination, in holy things, that have before them "the ages to come." They are those who live toward happiness, singing more and more, rejoicing more and more, the circles and the waves of their experience running with wider and wider sweep.

When we see men that are old and infirm, we sometimes say, "They look like disbranched trees"; but if God were to touch our eyes, and reveal to us the companies of angels that surround such venerable, waiting saints, we should never think that they were solitary, or impoverished, or to be pitied.

I love to think, also, in this view, that what seems to be the mystery of the silence of death, which envelops so many that we loved on earth, is not really a mystery. Our friends are separated from us because they are lifted higher than our faculties can go. Our child dies. It is the last that we can see of him here. He is lifted so far above us that we cannot follow him. He was our child; he was cradled in our arms; he clambered upon our knees. But instantly, in the twinkling of an eye, God took him, and lifted him up into his own sphere. And we see him not. But it is because we are not yet developed enough. We cannot see things spiritual with carnal eyes. But they who have walked with us here, who have gone beyond us, and whom we cannot see, are still ours. They are more ours than they ever were before. We cannot commune with them as we once could, because they are infinitely lifted above those conditions in which we are able to commune. We remain here, and are subject to the laws of this realm. They have gone where they speak a higher language and live in a higher sphere. But this silence is not the silence of vacuity, and this mystery is not the mystery of darkness and death. Theirs is the glory; ours is the waiting

for it. Theirs is the realization; ours is the hoping for it. Theirs is the perfection; ours is the immaturity striving to be ripe. And when the day comes that we shall disappear from these earthly scenes, we shall be joined to them again: not as we were—for we shall not then be as we were—but as they are, with God. We shall be like them and him.

And so, even in respect to the things that the heart holds dearest, and that we are called to give up, we are not gloomy and sad. For, as we go on down toward the end of life, and one after another is taken away from us, these "ages to come" are the breast of consolation to us. And we look toward them. We look away from the trite, and flat, and dreary monotony of the present; we look away from its storms; we look away from the oppressive heat of its Summer, and the bitter cold of its Winter; we look away from its temptations and trials; we look away from the things as they are, to that blessed time, ages from now, in which there shall be perfect thought, perfect feeling, perfect association, and perfect knowledge of God, knowing as we are known, and in which we shall go on forever and forever, blessed and blessing.

"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Our heavenly Father, we thank thee that thou hast made thyself familiar with us. Not that we understand thee, whose greatness surpasses all thought, and the richness of whose being transcends any experience that we know upon earth; but thou hast been pleased to liken thyself unto things familiar, and to call thyself Father, and to teach us to say, Our Father which art in heaven. We are thine, and thou art ours. Thou hast impressed us with thine all-comprehending love. Thou hast made us to feel what are the riches of thy being. Not only hast thou communicated to us by the world which is without, by the things which we behold in life around about us, but we have the witness of thy Spirit with ours. There is a voice inaudible to our outward sense—the voice of God in our soul. There is a divine presence in which is richness, and fullness of joy, and peace. Thou hast brought it near to us. We are witnesses of thy sustaining power, often, in circumstances of peril and of great trial. We have known thee when in solitude and in sorrow. We have felt thee in the midst of griefs and vehement afflictions. Thou hast come to us in the stirrings of fear. Thou hast drawn near to us in hours of great trouble, and manifested thyself to us as a God of peace and great mercy, forgiving iniquity and sin. And we rejoice that we have our heritage of experience in thee, and that with thy name has been associated much of our very life. And yet, how little of our nature hath gone toward thee! and how little of thine is explored or explorable by ours! How much in glorious reserve awaits our understanding, when we shall be born into spiritual things! Thou art far from us only because we are so small and so poor, and have known so little that interprets thee. And we rejoice that we are living toward the knowledge that yet shall be ours, and that thou hast in the future glorious and blessed things in store for those that serve thee faithfully unto the end. Grant that we may have convoying grace, that in all the perils of the way we may be surrounded by thy care. We commit our souls to thy keeping. To thee we commit all our worldly good—our friendships, our hopes, all the things for which our ambitions strive. And we desire that thou and thy righteous will should reign over all that we have, or hope to be.

And we beseech of thee that thou wilt keep alive in us, and quicken, conscience, that we may be more and more desirous of things that are true and right; of things that are high and divine. May we be delivered from the power of the world in undue measure. May we be delivered from too great avarice for its affairs, for its joy, for its pleasure. And we pray that we may have more and more the eye that beholds the invisible, and the heart that rests in things to come.

We pray for those in thy presence who offer up their thanksgiving. Wilt thou be pleased, this morning, to accept their grateful thanks.

Draw near to those that fain would confess to thee their sin, this morning, the burden of which lies heavy upon them, or hangs as a cloud above them. Wilt thou give them release from fear. Wilt thou give them that quietness which they have whose sins are forgiven.

And we pray that thou wilt be with all who come to thee for rescue in peril, and for deliverance out of temptation, and for patience and strength under the trials which press upon them. Thou knowest altogether every heart.

We commend to thee, this morning, those who fain would supplicate thy presence and thy mercies. We beseech of thee that thou wilt draw near to all those who are sitting in sorrow, and can scarcely look up, or call to thee, though their afflictions are great. And although for the present it is gloomy

and sorrowful, bring to them, by and by, the pleasant fruits of righteousness. We pray that thou wilt uphold them, that their faith may not fail them.

Be near to those that are perplexed, whether it be concerning their household, concerning their worldly affairs, or concerning themselves. We pray that they may cast their burden on the Lord, and feel sustained by his presence and grace.

Draw near, we beseech of thee, to all those who are in the midst of life's battle. May they be girded with strength that is not their own, but thine. May they be able to turn aside temptation and the tempter May they be able to acquit themselves like men.

And we pray, O Lord, our God! that thou wilt bless those who are laboring in word and in doctrine. May all that go forth to teach be themselves filled with the Holy Ghost. We pray that those who bear the tidings of truth to the scattered and the wandering may have the blessing of their Father evermore going with them. And may their souls be so full of the true spirit of the Gospel, that everywhere their words may win some. We thank thee that thy truth is not without power. We thank thee that those who labor in faith and in patience see of the travail of their souls. We thank thee that so many are from time to time turning away from evil, and learning the right path, and seeking to pursue the things that are noble and pure and right before God, and comely before men. May the truth be increased.

May those who are beginning a life reformed, a life upward and spiritual, not be discouraged nor overborne. And if they stumble, may they not be destroyed. Lift thou them up, and carry them unto the end.

And we pray for the rescue of the outcasts; of all that are in thrall; of all that fain would break away from passions; of all that are ensnared in their own sins. We pray, O Lord, Redeemer and Deliverer! that thou wilt send rescue to them.

Remember any that are backslidden; any that have known thee, and that are following but afar off, almost out of sight and light and warmth. Bring them near again to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls; and restore to them the joys of thy salvation.

We pray for the young, that they may grow up uncontaminated; that they may grow up valiant for the truth, and with a feeling of honor for things that are pure and right. We pray that they may be delivered from those that would destroy them. May the generation that is rising serve God and their country better than the generation which is passing away.

Cleanse the laws of this land, and all its customs. Grant that the magistracy may be everywhere God-fearing. Be pleased to bless the President of these United States, and those that are associated in counsel with him, and the members of the General Government, and of the Governments of the States. We pray, O Lord! that thou wilt grant unto them that guidance of thy wisdom which shall keep them from mistake and all harm.

Deliver this nation from intestine feuds, and from bitterness. And grant that justice and intelligence and virtue may thrive, and that on these a glorious perfection may be developed.

We pray for the nations of the earth—for those that are drinking blood. Let the cup pass speedily. O Lord! let not the iron heel of war forever dominate over the weak and the poor. Grant that at last thy banner may be lifted up, white, spotless, and peace prevail in all the earth. And may justice strengthen it and preserve it, and all the nations see thy salvation. We ask it for Christ Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

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